

## Appendix C

Bill Thompson



*Eastern wood peewee*

# Wilderness Review

- Introduction
- Inventory Criteria
- Wilderness Inventory Conclusions
- Conclusion



## Introduction

The purpose of a wilderness review is to identify and recommend to Congress the lands and waters of the National Wildlife Refuge System that merit inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS). Wilderness reviews are required elements of Comprehensive Conservation Plans, are conducted in accordance with the refuge planning process outlined in the Fish and Wildlife Service Manual (602 FW 1 and 3), and include compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and regulations on public involvement. Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) are areas that meet the criteria for wilderness identified in the Wilderness Act. Section 2(c) of the act gives the following definition:

*A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this Act an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions, and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least 5,000 acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.*

The wilderness review process has three phases: inventory, study, and recommendation. In the inventory phase, we identify lands and waters that meet the minimum criteria for wilderness as Wilderness Study Areas. In the study phase, we evaluate a range of management alternatives to determine whether a Wilderness Study Area is suitable for wilderness designation or management under an alternative set of goals and objectives not involving wilderness designation. In the recommendation phase, we forward a wilderness study report with recommendations on wilderness designation from the Director through the Secretary and the President to Congress. We prepare that report after our Regional Director has signed the record of decision for the final Comprehensive Conservation Plan.

We manage any areas recommended for designation to maintain their wilderness character in accordance with the management goals, objectives, and strategies in the final Comprehensive Conservation Plan, until Congress makes a decision or we amend the Comprehensive Conservation Plan to modify or remove the wilderness proposal. If the inventory does not identify any areas that meet the Wilderness Study Area criteria, we document our findings in the administrative record for the Comprehensive Conservation Plan and end the study process. We will manage non-wilderness areas following the management direction outlined in the Comprehensive Conservation Plan.

## Inventory Criteria

The wilderness inventory is a broad look at the planning area to identify Wilderness Study Areas. A Wilderness Study Area is a roadless area of undeveloped Federal land and water that meets the minimum criteria for wilderness as identified in Section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act.

### Minimum Wilderness Criteria

A Wilderness Study Area is required to be a roadless area or an island of any size, meet the size criteria, appear natural, and provide outstanding opportunity for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation.

### Evaluation of Roadless Criteria

Roadless refers to the absence of improved roads suitable and maintained for public travel by means of motorized vehicles primarily intended for highway use. A route maintained solely by the passage of vehicles does not constitute a road.

The following factors were the primary considerations in evaluating the roadless criteria:

- A. The area does not contain improved roads suitable and maintained for public travel by means of motorized vehicles primarily intended for highway use.

- B. The area is an island, or contains an island that does not have improved roads suitable and maintained for public travel by means of motorized vehicles primarily intended for highway use.
- C. The area is in Federal fee title ownership.

### **Evaluation of Size Criteria**

The size criteria can be satisfied if an area has at least 5,000 acres of contiguous, roadless, public (Federal) land, or is sufficiently large that its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition is practicable.

The following factors were the primary considerations in evaluating the size criteria.

- A. An area of more than 5,000 contiguous acres. State and private lands are not included in making this acreage determination.
- B. A roadless island of any size. A roadless island is defined as an area surrounded by permanent waters or that is markedly distinguished from the surrounding lands by topographical or ecological features.
- C. An area of less than 5,000 contiguous Federal acres that is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition, and of a size suitable for wilderness management.
- D. An area of less than 5,000 contiguous acres that is contiguous with a designated wilderness, recommended wilderness, or area under wilderness review by another Federal wilderness managing agency such as the Forest Service, National Park Service, or Bureau of Land Management.

### **Evaluation of Naturalness Criteria**

The Wilderness Act, section 2(c) defines wilderness as an area that “generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature with the imprint of human work substantially unnoticeable.” The area must appear natural to the average visitor, rather than “pristine.” The presence of historic landscape conditions is not required.

An area may include some human impacts provided they are substantially unnoticeable in the unit as a whole. In evaluating the naturalness criteria, we also consider significant hazards caused by humans, such as the presence of unexploded ordnance from military activity and the physical impacts of refuge management facilities and activities. An area may not be considered unnatural in appearance solely on the basis of the sights and sounds of human impacts and activities outside the boundary of the unit. We considered the cumulative effects of those factors, in conjunction with the size of the land base and its physiographic and vegetative characteristics in our evaluation of naturalness.

The following factors were the primary considerations in evaluating naturalness.

- A. The area appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature with the imprint of human work substantially unnoticeable.
- B. The area may include some human impacts provided they are substantially unnoticeable in the unit as a whole.
- C. The presence of unexploded ordnance from military activity or the existence of other significant hazards caused by humans.
- D. The presence of physical impacts of refuge management facilities and activities.

### **Evaluation of Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation Criteria**

A Wilderness Study Area must provide outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation. The area does not have to possess outstanding opportunities for both elements, and does not need to have outstanding opportunities on every acre. Further, an area does not have to be open to public use and access to qualify under this criteria; Congress has designated a number of wilderness areas in the Refuge System that are closed to public access to protect resource values.

Opportunities for solitude refer to the ability of a visitor to be alone and secluded from other visitors in the area. Primitive and unconfined recreation means non-motorized, dispersed outdoor recreation activities that are compatible and do not require developed facilities or mechanical transport. These primitive recreation activities may provide opportunities to experience challenge and risk, self-reliance, and adventure. These two elements are not well defined by the Wilderness Act, but can be expected to occur together in most cases. However, an outstanding opportunity for solitude may be present in an area offering only limited primitive recreation potential. Conversely, an area may be so attractive for recreation use that experiencing solitude is not an option.

The following factors were the primary considerations in evaluating outstanding opportunities for solitude, or primitive unconfined recreation.

- A. The area offers the opportunity to avoid the sights, sounds, and evidence of other people. A visitor to the area should be able to feel alone or isolated.
- B. The area offers non-motorized, dispersed outdoor recreation activities that are compatible and do not require developed facilities or mechanical transport.

### **Evaluation of Supplemental Values Criteria**

The Wilderness Act states that an area of wilderness may contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value. Supplemental values of the area are optional, but the degree to which their presence enhances the area's suitability for wilderness designation should be considered. The evaluation should be based on an assessment of the estimated abundance or importance of each of the features.

## **Wilderness Inventory Conclusions**

### **Evaluation of Roadless Criteria**

Each parcel of the refuge is either bisected or bordered by a major paved road used for public travel by motorized vehicles. The Island Pond parcel is bisected by paved roads and is bordered by Long Pond Road. The Crooked Pond parcel has a road that bisects the northwestern corner of the parcel and is abutted by roads and development that lead up to the conserved land.

### **Evaluation of Size Criteria**

This 209-acre refuge does not meet the minimum size criteria of greater than 5000 acres for a Wilderness Study Area.

### **Evaluation of Naturalness Criteria**

Due to its past agricultural use and its current management of habitat for northern red-bellied cooters, migratory songbirds, hazardous fuel reduction, and other early successional species habitat using mechanical vegetation removal and prescribed burns, this refuge does not meet the Naturalness criterion. There is evidence of heavy equipment and human induced fires.

### **Evaluation of Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation Criteria**

The refuge parcels are small in size. The large Myles Standish State Forest, that abuts the refuge is open for public access and attracts many visitors. Due to its proximity to development and to the heavily used State Forest, the refuge does not meet the solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation criteria for a Wilderness Study Area.

### **Evaluation of Supplemental Values Criteria**

The refuge does contain features that are of ecological value and interest for research and education. The refuge is managed for the federally endangered northern red-bellied cooter. It is also currently managed for pitch pine-oak upland forest habitat conducive to several rare plants and invertebrates dependent on xeric pitch pine-scrub oak shrubland association (sandplain heathland community) habitat. Therefore, the refuge does meet the supplemental values criteria for a Wilderness Study Area.

## Conclusion

No Massasoit NWR parcels meet the criteria for a Wilderness Study Area and the refuge is not recommended for further evaluation. While the refuge meets the supplemental value criteria, it does not meet the minimum requirements for wilderness in regard to size, roadlessness, naturalness, or outstanding opportunity for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation.

**Table C-1. Massasoit NWR Wilderness Review Finding Summary**

Refuge unit and acreage (fee simple only)	(1) has at least 5,000 acres of land or is of sufficient size to make practicable its preservation and use in an unconfined condition, or is a roadless island;	(2) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable;	(3a) has outstanding opportunities for solitude;	(3b) has outstanding opportunities for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation;	(4) contains ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.	Parcel qualifies as a wilderness study area (meets criteria 1, 2, and 3a or 3b)
Massasoit NWR 209 acres	No. The refuge is 209 acres, located in the densely populated town of Plymouth, Massachusetts in Plymouth County, Massachusetts.	No. The refuge has a previous land use of agriculture. The refuge is managed with mechanical vegetation removal and prescribed burns.	No. The refuge parcels are small in size. The large forest that abuts the refuge is open for public access and attracts many visitors.  Public access is limited due to the protection of the endangered red-bellied cooter.	No. The small size of the refuge precludes outstanding opportunities for unconfined or primitive recreation.	Yes. The refuge and its surrounding area is designated habitat for the endangered Northern red bellied cooter.  The refuge is currently managed for habitat conducive to the candidate species, New England cottontail, and rare invertebrates.	No.